

AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES
November 6, 2008

Members Present: Daniel Clapp, Joel Gordon, Doris Holden, Rosemary Kofler, Barbara Sutherland, Juana Trujillo, David Yaukey

Absent: Joan Golowich, Kathy Koplow

Select Board Liaison, Gerry Weiss: absent

Staff Present: Nancy Pagano (Director/Program Director), Maura Plante (Assistant Director/Services), Giovanna Mix (Administrative Assistant for Programs)

Guests: Marge Babb

Welcome:

Dan Clapp, Vice Chair, called the Council on Aging meeting to order at 9:17 AM.

Opportunity for Public Comment:

There were no comments.

Minutes of Previous Meeting:

A minor typing error was corrected. The minutes of the September 11, 2008 meeting were approved and accepted.

Friends of Amherst Senior Center Treasurer's Report:

Doris reported a balance of \$4,941.70 in the checking account and a balance of \$75,678.57 in the investment account. Investments dropped by about \$6,000 since September. The advisor at Edward Jones recommended leaving our investments where they are.

CONTINUING BUSINESS

40th anniversary Dinner:

Nancy expressed deep gratitude for the event and for the personal recognition. She said there were so many COA members, volunteers, and participants who built the rocks on which the Senior Center could grow. She feels lucky to have a career in a place where she has been able to meet and know so many wonderful people. Nancy was moved by the whole experience of the evening – having Betty Kravatz speak, Stephanie O'Keeffe's moving words, recognizing Allen Torrey (first Town Manager), having Stan Rosenberg participate, John Musante and Larry Shaffer's presence, plus all the warm social interactions. It was a precious night and over too quickly.

Dan remarked about how well the set up by COA members went, how much fun it was despite the work and how good the dinner was.

Update on Form Change for Emergency Funds:

Maura provided a handout and minutes of the Sub-Committee meeting that Maura, Dan, Doris, Barbara and Juana attended on September 17, 2008. Guidelines which must be met in order for a senior to use funds from the Friends include: 1) Amherst resident 60 years or older 2) use for medical, dental or utilities 3) Max income of \$25,000/one person or \$30,000/more than one person 4) must have applied for and used benefits from other agencies if for utilities 5) first come, first served basis. The money would be given as a loan to be paid back (if possible), allowing more seniors to be helped. An application form was developed.

Dan asked why the money could not be used for food. **Maura** said that there are many other resources for food assistance – emergency food pantry, food stamps, Brown Bag, meal programs, Wednesday Bread Program, Survival Center, Not Bread Alone. **Joel** asked how people learn about those resources. Are churches alerted? **Maura** said she puts articles in the Senior Spirit. She certainly could send information to faith communities. Features stories in the newspaper would also help. **Juana**, Support Service Coordinator for Housing, pointed out that people in the housing apartments are very well informed. Many of those people are low income. The Clark House is a little different. Information given there is mostly by word of mouth. Maura will give Kathy Koplow copies of the food programs and resources.

Budget Update:

Nancy showed the Power Point that she and Maura presented to the Select Board on November 3, 2008. Some highlights:

Demographics show growth among numbers of elders 60 and older. In 2007 there were 3699 and some were unaccounted for. MA is among the states with the highest percent of elderly. Amherst proportionately has a larger percentage of elders than most towns. Amherst is a retirement haven and for the Town they bring in new tax money.

The Town assessor expects that with reassessments this year there will be as much as a 40% increase in some assessments. Many seniors are not affluent and a growing number live at the poverty line. They can't afford the taxes on their homes and yet are unable to sell their homes. The Senior Center budget is not keeping up with the growth of the elder population. There has been an increase in demand for food programs, especially home delivered meals. Adding to the problem is the fact that food supplies for the Brown Bag and Bread programs have gone down.

Nancy pointed out that there has been some new programs added to the Senior Center recently but they are funded through grants not taxation. Programs such as the Counseling Center, the Senior Health Services, Nursing Outreach, the Emergency Fund, the free legal services through the Hampshire County Bar Association and the Thanksgiving dinner are all funded by grants or donations.

Nancy showed how the Senior Center budget has declined steadily. We have 3 full time plus 1 part time staff. We depend on 301 volunteers, which equals \$80,861 in donated services at minimum wage. Nancy's first budget priority is staff. She had to cut Center Activities to ZERO, Office Supplies to ZERO, Dues and Subscriptions to ZERO for FY10.

Nancy stressed that the value of the Senior Center goes beyond the services we provide. We are concerned with the whole person and want to provide elders with the opportunity to come together to prevent isolation and depression and to maintain a sense of community, independence and dignity.

All departments are down to bare bones spending. Furthermore, state aid could decrease as much as 15%.

NEW BUSINESS**Appointment of COA Members to Friends Funding Committee:**

Joel volunteered to be part of the Friends/COA joint committee to come up with ways to fund the Senior Center.

My Senior Center Info and Orientation:

Nancy said there would be a front-page article in the December *Senior Spirit* about this system. The State and Town require a very detailed statistical report from the Senior Center every year. It has been a monumental task to hand count everything that happens at the Center – volunteer hours, class attendance, miles driven for meal deliveries, etc. One year some student volunteers developed a computer program to track these statistics. It was funded by the Department of Elder Affairs and is very successful. Now 300 Senior Centers in the country use it - 100 are in MA. IT funding plus savings we have had was used to buy the program. Everyone who comes into the Center gets a swipe card that gives us an instantaneous profile of the user and how he or she used the Center.

Donation from Amherst College:

Nancy reported that the movie industry donated \$40,000 to Amherst College for the use of their facilities in making a movie. The College gave the \$40,000 to the Town. \$20,000 will be used for the schools. \$20,000 will be split between Community Services and the Senior Center. The \$10,000 is in our Gift Account. It will be used for Emergency Funds.

SeniorNet Update:

Senior Net teaches elders how to run classes in computer skills. Nancy has a graduate student from Smith College who will look into bringing that program to our Senior Center.

STAFF REPORTS

Wednesday Bread Outlook:

Maura reported that we have been getting less food from the stores and bakeries that have been donating to us. Consequently, we have less food to offer and we have had to cut back on the number of volunteers who help with the program. The volunteers have been put on a less frequent schedule. We get food from Atkins, Whole Foods, Traders Joe's, Big Y, and Henion Bakery.

SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATE

Friends Meeting:

Nancy spoke in Doris' absence. The Friends will do their annual solicitation. There will be one in the Senior Spirit and one to merchants. They will also apply to Florence Savings Bank for their annual donation.

Ad Hoc Survey Committee:

David reported that they did not meet this month. The next meeting will be Monday, November 10, 2008.

Highland Valley Elder Services:

No report.

Comprehensive Planning Committee:

Rosemary reported. The Master Plan was edited by the APC, the consulting group and returned to the CPC at the end of summer. Meanwhile, Chapter 2 (Executive Summary) was revised by the CPC Review Sub-Committee. The full CPC met and approved the Master Plan on September 9, 2008. The text is basically the same as what is on file in the Jones Library with some refinements. The Planning Dept. still has to add maps and other graphic material. It will go to the Planning Board sometime this week. Implementation takes place via the Planning Board. Any zoning regulations or changes will require a 2/3-majority approval by Town Meeting.

Nancy asked what it says about the Senior Center.

Rosemary said that the Senior Center itself is not addressed, however, each component of the Master Plan looks at issues related to seniors.

The COA meeting adjourned at 10:30 AM.

The next COA meeting will be held December 4, 2008 at 9:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Rosemary Kofler, Secretary

The approved minutes of the September 11, 2008 meeting were delivered to the Select Board Office to be filed.